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by Brother Victor SSF

FOREWORD

by

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For the Church of England, the recent admission of women to the diaconate has given added impetus to the search for a renewed understanding and appreciation of 'diakonia'. This search has taken many forms, and practical projects and new initiatives in theological reflection are evident all around. Brother Victor's paper is a valuable and stimulating contribution to the debate, offering as it does a positive theology of the diaconate alongside an account of a visit to the United States of America to see the work of distinctive deacons there.

The Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry is happy to commend this particular and vividly personal essay to a wide readership.

THE SERVANT LEADER: IMPRESSIONS OF DEACONS IN THE U.S.A.

by

BROTHER VICTOR SSF

People have been ordained deacon in the Church of England throughout its history. The Order of Deacons is upheld as one of the threefold Orders of Ministry which are a sign of the catholicity and apostolicity of our church. Yet it is undoubtedly the most neglected and shadowy of the ordained ministries, and possibly of the non-ordained also. For men, it is the traditional probationary year for the ordained priesthood. Some like to look back on this with a certain nostalgia as showing that they are really deacons too, though more in sentiment than with any cash-value. For women, there is also much confusion. Either ordination to the diaconate is too recent for much reflection on what it means, or it is felt to make no significant difference to their previous deaconess ministry. More sharply still, it may not be the Order of Ministry to which God is ultimately calling them, or indeed all three confusions are present together within the same people.

However, the Church of England does not exist in a vacuum, and in recent years other parts of the Anglican Communion, and other Communions, have put considerable effort into renewing their theological understanding and practical deployment of deacons. In 1980 I attended a conference which considered the ecumenical dimension to the diaconate. Here were Roman Catholic deacons explaining how the diaconal revival was proceeding in that church, its possibilities for expanding the concepts of ministry on the one hand, and the difficulty of establishing its credibility, especially in England, and of avoiding the

suspicion that its underlying usefulness was as a sop to the ministerial aspirations of married men on the other. There was also the striking contrast between the Orthodox deacons, whose role is primarily liturgical, and the Lutheran deacon, who is a professional church-based social worker without any liturgical function at all. Here also the Wesleyan Deaconess Order recounted the sad tale of what happened when the 'full' Methodist Ministry was opened to women, without a clear and viable diaconal ministry to complement it - it was fatally wounded. Some good news, however, is that the way is being prepared in the Methodist Church for an order of deacons to be created which will be open to women and men.

It seemed remarkable that such a diversity of ministry could all be labelled diaconal, and all look to a New Testament root for inspiration. However, this conference provided the catalyst in my own thinking, which than led me to the Southwark Ordination Course and on to five months in the USA, studying how deacons are trained and deployed in the Episcopal Church in that country.

What follows is an outline of a theology of the nature of the church and its ministry from which the renewed diaconate appears to grow, and a look at what this has meant in practical terms in one part of the American Episcopal Church. This will include an examination of training methods and in-service support, and will then focus on the ministry of four deacons as examples of how the whole engagement of the Church in its vocation to herald and serve the Kingdom of God has been enfleshed and enhanced.

The Organic Nature of the Church

We have lived for so long with an hierarchical view of the Church, and with the line between clerical and lay being so firmly drawn, that it can be a shock to realise that this is not inherent to the Church, but one possible

development from New Testament times. In order to recover an understanding of the deacon it is necessary to deal with the nature of the church, even in a small way, because, as G W H Lampe (1) observes, the problems that have beset all attempts to deal with the ministry of the Church have failed through not dealing first of all with the nature of the Church itself.

James M Barrett in his excellent work The Diaconate: a Full and Equal Order (2), opens by saying, "The principle of the diaconate as an office and function of the Church is rooted in the nature of the Church itself as it was originally founded and lived in the pre-Nicene world. The first principle of that church as it came into being was that it was 'laos', the people of God. The church was called into being by God and made "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people". All were 'laos'. There was no word to distinguish, in the sense of today, between clergy and laity. The clergy were laity along with others who belonged to the people of God." This is a statement of the original nature of the Church, which is organic in concept and practice. The New Testament word for 'church' is not 'kuriakon' (the Lord's House), from which it is derived, but 'ecclesia', which always means an assembly of people and cannot mean a building. The ecclesial community, the Church, as Walter Lowrie (3) points out, is not composed of individual Churches for there is one Ecclesia, the assembly of the whole of Christendom but this one Ecclesia has innumerable manifestations. This suggests that use of an organic or cellular model of the church. In the same way as a body has a number of different organs all composed of vast numbers of tiny, inter-dependent cells, so the church can also be seen in this same way. These inter-dependent cells represent parishes, chaplaincies, and other 'eucharistic' communities or intentional gatherings of Christians. These in themselves, either individually or in groups, come together to form the different manifestations referred to above.

The model which has been developed here suggests that a healthy functioning of both the whole and of each individual cell is necessary. If one or more cells begin to decay and die, then it will have an effect upon the whole. Similarly, if the whole body ceases to function as an integrated unit, then the various cells will suffer. Paul develops this image of church as a body, with particular references to the individual organ. He sees the harmony of all the parts working together as themselves, ie. a leg being a leg and not an arm, as revealing the nature of Christ. This body is endowed with its character by the Spirit, who gives gifts to each part, and, in the selfgiving love generated through the harmony of all the parts, brings forth the Christlikeness of the whole. The qualification for ministry in this body is baptism. In the pre-Nicene age the Church's ministry is that of the whole people of God, and baptism confers the privilege and responsibility of taking part in that ministry.

The Servant Nature of the Church's Ministry

There are two main perceptions of ministry which characterise the New Testament view both of their own ministries and that of Jesus. These are 'apostellein' (sent) and 'diakonein' (serve). Luke and Mark record that Jesus saw his task as a fulfilment of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind." It is also central to John that Jesus sees himself as sent to do his Father's will. In their turn, the disciples are also sent out as extensions of the work of Jesus to heal and teach; then Paul and Barnabas are commissioned and sent by Christ to preach (1 Cor 1:17). Indeed, an underlying idea in the whole of the New Testament is that the whole Church has been sent into the world, which thought is reflected in the nature of the principal

ministerial gifts to the Church: apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors and teachers. It is this concept of the church being sent that has later become known as the mission of the church. This mission, or sending, can be developed using a great variety of different models. It does not preclude the possibility of God already being at work within the community, and the church working alongside these manifestations of God's presence to encourage and alert people to them.

The second characteristic, 'diakonein', is so pervasive of the New Testament writings that is is possible to miss its impact through overfamiliarity or because it was so taken for granted by the writers as to be assumed. Luke in his gospel reports Jesus as saying: "I am among you as one who serves." (Lk 22:27). This is not the place to examine all the scriptural references to 'diakonia' (service) and 'diakonos' (servant). These references are many and varied. They range from Jesus being quoted in the gospels as saying that th bridegroom will come to his servants at the wedding feast, and he will "gird himself and have them sit at table", and he will "come and serve (diakonesai) them." (Lk 12:37), to even sharper references in the gospel of Mark: "for the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). In Paul we find many references to this service. In 1 Cor 12:5 he refers to "varieties of service but the same Lord", but the classical arguments on ministry for Paul are set out in 2 Cor particularly in chapters 4:1 to 6:13. In 2 Cor 4:1 Paul writes "therefore, having this ministry (diakonia) by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart", and Paul reaches the climax of his argument in 2 Cor 5:18 where he writes "all this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry (diakonia) of reconciliation". Here 'diakonia' is the root word for all ministry, and this further reinforces the significance of such servant leadership in Paul's writing. Furthermore, it becomes clear that central to Paul's understanding of 'diakonia'

is that it is participation in the ministry of Christ and that we are all called to this ministry of reconciliation. In the New Testament writings the tasks of many women and men are described as 'diakonia' and even the collective task of the offering for the church in Jerusalem is understood in this way (2 Cor 9:12-13). As the church has developed, so individual ministers and particular groups have focussed this ministry of reconciliation and encouraged the whole church to be a servant body.

Service, given with the humility that is characteristic of the ministry of Jesus, is presented as the crux of entrance into heaven in the great parable of Judgement (Mtt 25), and the epitome of Jesus the Servant is given in the simple, dramatic way he assumes the role of the lowest household slave and washes the disciples' feet. (Jn 13.4). As Barnett says (4), "There can be little doubt that Jesus intended to create a radically new consciousness in his disciples regarding their ministry." Like everyone else, they thought of greatness and leadership in terms of rank, prestige and power. Jesus clearly reversed this system of values: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk 10:44-45). There is no suggestion here that there was to be no leadership or no exercising of power in the new community, but that there was to be a radically different attitude towards leadership and power characterised by the 'diakonia' of Christ.

Thus, when someone is baptised, they are baptised into a body, one of whose central functions is to minister, whose self-understanding is of being sent as a servant on a mission of reconciliation, healing and teaching. All of these activities issue from the church's character, which is formed in a spirit of humble service. What the church is is just as significant as what it does, and this is true of its minsitry both within the Christian community and to the world.

The Deacon in the Church

In being the body of Christ in the world, the ecclesial community needs to exhibit and contain within itself the whole range of characterisation and facets that make up the "stature of the fulness of Christ". All elements of the body are necessary, but some are so fundamental to the whole, so vital a characteristic that the body would be radically distorted if they were not present. They are fundamental because they reflect the ministry of Christ himself as the supreme agent of God's reconciling love. The various fundamental elements of Christ's ministry, including his 'episkope',his high priesthood, and his serving ministry came to be reflected in the ministry of the whole church. As the church developed, so these ministries were focussed in the threefold order of bishop, priest (presbyter) and deacon. Naturally, these three elements continued to interweave and overlap in the church and between the various orders but, nevertheless, the threefold order helped to focus some of these specific elements more sharply than others. The individual orders and ministries are not, then, to be understood as part of the body as such, as its heart or its hands, but rather as those who focus and encourage those vital characteristics of the ministry of Christ which the whole body is called to reflect and which they represent and focus as ministers.

These various ministries then focus these different elements. A body has to be held together, it needs a sense of unity and cohesion which is signified through the life and ministry of the bishop. Added to this is the role of the bishop as spiritual leader in a particular geographical locality. The body of Christ needs to know itself as a royal priesthood, capable of offering a sacrifice of praise for the whole of creation. By living out something of the priesthood of Christ, presbyters are also able to act as elders giving guidance to a local gathered community, reconciling and feeding in imitation of the priestly function of all the baptised. 'Diakonia' defines both the ministry of the whole Church and the

attitude with which each part of the Church is to undertake it, in the same way as 'royal priesthood' defines a vital characteristic of the whole Church. In an organic view of the Church the ordained ministries are neither in competition with each other, nor are they detracting or taking away from the ministry of all the 'laos'. Deacons do not have a monopoly of servant ministry, for that would be to deny the ministry of the whole church. Rather, they are to equip, train and nurture the servanthood of the people of God. Still more important, the deacon is to be a sign, a representative/icon of Christ the Servant as servant-leader in the church.

This function of servant-leader has its proper liturgical expression appropriate to Christ as Servant in the eucharist, equipping the whole body for its task of humble service in the world. It is from this point of view that the liturgical functions of proclaiming the Gospel, organising the Intercessions, inviting to confession, waiting at table, administering communion and dismissing the assembly are best seen. This is not the work of the deacon but the liturgical expression of that work.

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This is almost where I had got to in my thinking prior to my time in the USA. But living in a part of the Anglican Communion that has very little in the way of sustainable, thought-out models of the ordained diaconate meant that all this was unearthed and theoretical. That is not to say that there are no good models of diaconal service in England. On the contrary, the Church of England abounds in them. All ministry that is Christian is diaconal in nature, and organised bodies of diaconal ministry are everywhere, from the work of the Church Army and Religious Orders such as my own, to the origins of the hospice

movement and the Samaritans, to the countless works of caring outreach in the parishes of this land. What the ordained diaconate contributes to this picture is to say that this service is so vital, so of the essence of the Church, that it ought not to be left to individual parts only, but deserves and requires an ordained ministry to give it focus and cohesion throughout the whole. But again there is very little in England to give guidance or suggest what the appropriate shape of the ordained diaconate ought to be - what actual difference would it make in a church that uses deacons properly - so the opportunity to explore this question in America was very welcome and proved to be most enlightening.

The American Revival of the Diaconate

The history of the revival of the diaconate in the Episcopal Church in America would make an absorbing study in itself. All that need concern us is that the theology and structure of ministry in America prior to the mid-1970s was roughly analogous to our own.

My experience of the developments since that time were confined to the School for Deacons in California and the dioceses that it serves. It should, therefore, be borne in mind that methods of training, deploying and supporting deacons will vary in different parts of the USA. The history and development of the Episcopal Church gives it a stronger congregational basis, with a different emphasis given to parishes, dioceses and provinces. So, for instance, a diocese is wholly responsible for the selection of candidates for ordained ministry, and the parish is the dominant financial unit. These factors do influence the style and direction of ministry, and are also responsible for the patchy growth of the ordained diaconate.

The following few statistics demonstrate the growth pattern:

1970 450 deacons (350 men, 100 women). A substantial proportion of these men had been ordained to a parish assistant style of "permanent" deacon for many years. Almost all the women were deaconesses who for some reason did not proceed to priests' orders.

1986 896 deacons (633 men, 263 women). There are also 353 in training (197 men, 156 women), and 301 aspirants (151 men, 150 women).

It is noteworthy, given that the admittance of women to the presbyterate has been on the same time-scale as the renewal of the order of deacons, that, whilst women number only 29% of the ordained deacons, they comprise 44% of those in training and half those officially aspiring to deacons' orders. These figures do not include transitional deacons who are hoping to be ordained as presbyters.

A glance through the dioceses of New England (Province 1) tells its own story of growth and development, and is reprseentative of the country as a whole:

Connecticut Had 8 deacons ordained over a decade ago. Has recently begun a training programme with 14 candidates (6 men, 8 women).

Maine Has 14 deacons, mostly from a first programme recently completed. A new training programme is in progress.

Massachusetts 2 deacons of long standing. No progress made until a new bishop was appointed last autumn. There are 22 unofficial aspirants for deacon training.

New Hampshire No deacons at all. A study is being made of "new ministries".

Rhode Island 10 deacons. Has a thriving School for Deacons with over 20 students, and a supportive bishop.

Vermont 3 deacons. Bishop recently announced the start of a new training progrmme for 6 aspirants.

Western Massachusetts 16 deacons, four of whom trained jointly with Roman Catholic deacons. A study has been completed on the experience of and with these deacons and a new training scheme should emerge.

The School for Deacons, California

Before looking at the present work of the School, a short account of its history might be informative to the present discussion on training for ministry.

In 1960 Bishop James Pike, a somewhat singular person whose memory is still a potent factor in the diocese, set up a course of training for men to equip them to be 'permanent' or 'perpetual' deacons. A number of other American dioceses did similar things at that time. The nature of this ministry as understood by the bishop and his advisers was to be assistant parish clergy. This is illustrated in his ordaining some of these men on the Christmas Eve of the same year as the course started so that they could administer the chalice at the Midnight Mass. These were people of good standing in their parishes, who were called out to minister among them. This well-intentioned but limited and merely pragmatic understanding of the deacon's role meant that it was condemned to stagnation. It also perpetuated the old hierarchical model of the church by simply clericalising good 'layfolk' and putting them in a subordinate role to parish priests. Some of these deacons are still around, unmovable and distinctive in feeling left behind by the newer deacons.

The first course expanded into a ministry training scheme offering study opportunities for any who were seeking auxiliary (non-stipendiary) ministry. A rather large number of students were ordained both as deacons and

priests over the next decade. There could well be a correlation between courses such as these and the surfeit of ordained priests that exist in some parts of the United States today.

In 1976 a Diocesan School for Ministries was created. This attempted to do what the previous course had done but with increased expertise and resources. All candidates for ordination spent some time there. Those wishing to be ordained priest went on to spend a further year in a seminary, those for the diaconate or other ministries completed their studies here. Some of the deacons from this period have since been ordained priest.

In 1980 the present bishop of California, William Swing, determined to separate out the training for differing ministries and make them more distinctively appropriate to their differing aims and requirements. Because of the excess of presbyters in the diocese (approx 320 for 95 parishes) he stopped ordaining people to an auxiliary ministry as priests, requiring that all candidates for this office go to a seminary. The School for Ministries evolved into the School for Deacons, and the present Dean, Very Rev'd Shirley F Woods, was appointed. Another interesting development of this strategy was the formation of a Lay Academy. This is based at the diocesan office and provides an imaginative range of training courses and programmes for a wide range of 'lay' ministry from Sunday School teaching to spiritual formation.

The Present Position

The School is affiliated with the diocese of California (the San Francisco Bay area of the State of California), though it accepts students from other dioceses, especially the diocese of El Camino Real to the south, which was carved out of the parent diocese only a few years back. It is a self-supporting institution, recognised as a degree-awarding body by the State of California.

Students pay for their education, some with parish or other assistance, and the course lasts for about three years. One can attain either a Certificate for the Completion of Diaconal Studies or a Bachelor of Theological Studies (BTS), but though the Certificate is a requirement for ordination, neither of them is a guarantee of ordination. Because of the nature and length of the selection process, very few candidates are ordained immediately after completing the course, and some are not accepted for ordination at all.

The present home for the School is with Holy Cross Church in Castro Valley, which is based in a small redundant school. This site provides reasonable facilities for the School when in session, as well as offering a library, a media resources centre and office facilities the rest of the time. There is no overnight accommodation available so the residential weekends that were the normal mode of meeting between 1980 and 1983, when the School met at a Roman Catholic Franciscan Convent, are no longer part of the students' experience. In talking with past and present students this is clearly a loss. The School and Holy Cross Church have entered a partnership to purpose-build new facilities of their own, and the School is committed to raising $250,000.

Saturday is school day, which begins with a Eucharist at 8.00am and ends with evening prayer at 6.00pm. Given the distances that some people have to travel (leaving home between 5.00 amd 6.00am is not uncommon), this constitutes quite a time commitment, even if for most terms it is limited to two Saturdays a month.
The educational content of the course is much like a ministerial training scheme or theological college in this country. There is an Academic Curriculum of the Bible, Church History, Ethics, etc., and a Functional Curriculum of such subjects as Contemporary Social Problems, Spiritual Guidance and Christian Education, which includes a number of field trips. A student can also elect to do extra classes on Saturdays other than the regular ones for

special tuition in Hospice Care, Prison Ministry, Family Life Problems, etc., or receive more intensive tuition in the regular curriculum. The significant difference in all this is that the particular ministry of a deacon colours and influences all that happens and the background assumptions under which everything is taught and learned.

An important element of the course is entitled Introduction to Hospital Ministry. This occupies twenty consecutive Saturdays, usually in the second year, and its successful completion is a requirement for ordination in California. It is organised by a deacon, a graduate of the School, and is based at a large hospital in San Francisco. In content this is an intensive introduction and exposure to pastoral care and counselling using a hospital as its context. The Americans call this form of training Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), and as such is more developed and integrated into theological education than any scheme that I am aware of over here.

The School also gives a thorough grounding in the liturgical function of a deacon, emphasising their setting in the context of the whole of a diaconal ministry. Former students usually act as deacon in the liturgy, often preaching and being around to talk about their ministry afterwards. The American Prayer Book is helpful to the general understanding of deacons in liturgy by printing out in the rubrics those parts of the service which are proper to the deacon. An argument commonly used in the Church of England against the restoration of the deacon as a full and equal order of ordained ministry is that the liturgical functions of a deacon are already performed by Readers. This is not the case in the United States, where it is not usual for ordinary church members to read the Gospel or administer the chalice, and where Readers stay with their ancient function of reading lessons and Offices. Having witnessed the interplay of ordained and non-ordained ministries for five months - from the splendour of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco to the intimacy of a house-chapel - one becomes dissatisfied

with the muddle that exists here. After all, the bishop's liturgical functions signify his role in the wider church of the diocese, and the priest's liturgical functions similarly signify the presbyteral role within the Christian community wherever it gathers. Likewise, the deacon's role in liturgy signifies his/her function of enabling the servant ministry of the Church and recalling/imaging its servant nature. The liturgical functions of a deacon, therefore, belong to the office of a deacon conferred through the grace of orders, however that is understood. This is not the case with Readers or other persons who perform these things through an ever-increasing set of permissions, which may or may not bear any relation to the function of that person within the Christian community during the rest of the week, and are certainly not of the nature of their ministry. Expediency does not make a good model for ministry, nor is it how an organic body works.

The students meet in small groups in their own areas each month with a facilitator. These used to be called "Cell Groups" but that was thought to smack too much of Communism (!), so they now rejoice under the name of "Spirituality Formation and Community Development Groups." The intention is to provide a forum for sharing ideas, insights, difficulties and experiences in order to support and build each other up. Some appear to flourish and others not. The group to which I belonged was open and affirming, and in those circumstances was a good benefit to the members. However, the hope that these would continue beyond completion of the course is only true of one group that I know of, though this is early days and the potential has yet to be explored.

The Process of Selection

Candidates for ordination, whether as deacons or presbyters, are selected by the same process. This involves acceptance by the Rector and Vestry (PCC), the

bishop, the Commission on Ministry (whose criteria for selection are carefully laid down), and the Standing Committee of the diocese. The Standing Committee is sometimes seen as a final and fairly formal assent, but it can refuse to recommend, as it did to one candidate whilst I was there, and less than a week before the date for his ordination. Accompanying this process is the inevitable form filling and references, and two oral examinations, one on the content of the Bible and one on the Prayer Book.

As stated previously, the training itself is independent of the selection process, though one cannot be formally accepted as a candidate for Orders until the Clinical Pastoral Education is done, and not accepted finally until the course is satisfactorily completed.

The Deployment of Deacons

The bishops of both dioceses, California and El Camino Real, take a close interest in, and oversight of, their deacons, regarding them as "members of the bishop's household." Whilst there are many similarities in the way deacons are deployed, there are sufficient differences to warrant a separate look at both dioceses.

El Camino Real is geographically larger but contains only about 45 parishes. There are currently 12 deacons and 14 are in training. All except one have a parish base to their ministry. They are directed to a parish by the bishop in consultation with the Rector; this may be the deacon's home parish, but in any case none are paid for this work. The bishop favours moving people around occasionally in line with a developing strategy for the diocese. The deacon has direct access to the bishop and meets with him as he journeys round the diocese. The Rector is the leader of a parish, and the deacons are seen as exercising a complementary and not inferior ministry as leaders responsible for the enablement of service by that congregation. However, people's attitudes do not change

in a decade, and this theory does not always bear much relationship to practice. Mostly the deacon's ministry will take a fairly predictable path - organising sick visiting, starting a parish food bank for the poor, establishing a creche - calling into being those small acts of service by which the church grows into the stature of Christ. Sometimes this service takes a larger shape, as with the development of a whole congregation of Laotian people and their integration into a parish comunity, the formation of the Santa Maria Urban Mission in San Jose, which is a drop-in centre for food, clothes and advice for Hispanic people, or the episcopal chaplaincy of the huge prison at Soledad.

One particular project which is entrusted to deacons is the training and oversight of Lay Eucharistic Ministers. This function, established nationally by a recent General Convention, allows members of the congregation to take the Eucharistic elements from the altar on a Sunday to the sick and housebound as an extension of the parish worship. In the diocese of California the oversight only is given to deacons; the training is done by the Lay Academy.

There are other differences in the diocese of California as well. Given that the diocese contains about 95 parishes in a much smaller area, and has 39 deacons, 13 accepted candidates and a further 20+ in training, there is greater possibility for diversification and exploration of new forms of ministry. Many deacons are parish-based, and with styles of ministry as above, though they appear to be less directed to parishes by the bishop. One or two parishes employ deacons as parish administrators, and one parish advertised for and employs a deacon part-time. Some of the more specialist ministries in prisons, hospitals, convalescent homes and with the deaf will be the subject of small individual profiles further on in this review.

Two other observations at this point. Firstly, that San Francisco itself contains very few deacons, probably due to the overabundance of priests in the city, which raises

questions about the conditions under which the ordained diaconate flourishes. Secondly, a deacon is appointed as Cathedral Deacon for a year. Whilst this is largely a liturgical function with some pastoral duties, it does give a focus for the deacons right at the centre of diocesan life.

In-Service Support

The bishops, as part of their oversight and availability to deacons, give personal support in differing ways. Bishop Swing has four evenings a year with his deacons for dinner and discussion. Bishop Mallory of El Camino Real has an annual weekend retreat with his deacons, and is structuring his visits to parishes in such a way that a deacon will always accompany him.

Bishop Mallory has also appointed a retired Rector as Archdeacon for deacons and auxiliary priests. Archdeacon McCabe, who arranged the first training for deacons in the 60s and early 70s, is responsible for a two year post-ordination programme, and does some individual pastoral care, though much of this is provided within the local "cell" group, which is one of the ones that thrives. In the diocese of California a deacon acts as a pastor to the deacons, though, apart from visiting them individually on an infrequent basis, it is difficult to see how else he functions or is intended to function.

The School itself provides a focus of continuing support; in the "cell" groups even as they are; by encouraging former students to return for study and to minister liturgically; through its own newsletter, The Deacons' Bench; and through the personal availability of the Dean.

Further afield, the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP) offers a continuing education programme for deacons during the summer, which attracts people from Province 8 (the West Coast States). There is also the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD), formerly the

National Centre for the Diaconate, which collects and disseminates information on the diaconate, organises national conferences, and publishes a very useful periodical of news and views, Diakoneo, and other publications on different aspects of the deacon's ministry. There is no desk for deacons' affairs at the National Church Office in New York, which was a surprising deficiency, but perhaps not in the context of the American Church.

Personal Profiles

These reflections so far have been on the structure of the training and deployment of deacons and the theology from which it springs. But the real cash-value of all this is in the basic question that I took with me to America - what difference should it actually make to be ordained a deacon? In tangible, accessible terms, what difference does it make to a Church when deacons, in the full sense of that word, minister in it? The best way into these questions is to observe the ministries of individual deacons as they are lived out. Having met so many good and engaging people who collectively built up a clear and comprehensive picture for me, it is difficult to select a few individuals as illustrations. However, here are short profiles of four deacons, two women and two men, which reveal some of the distinctiveness of the diaconate. None of these is parish-based in the conventional sense; this is not in order to detract from parochial ministry, but because it is easier to see this distinctiveness when the deacon and the presbyter are not working so closely together.

Bob Seifert Bob has a military background, and was until recently a partner in a successful "Silicon Valley" business. He is a level-headed, practical person, physically and mentally alert. Bob candidated for ordination thinking to exercise a ministry in a parish, but, during training, began to question the whole way his life was moving. Bishop Mallory saw his potential and

offered to make Bob the Administrative Officer for the diocese. During the five days I spent in his company, I was impressed not just by his efficiency and knowledge of the concerns and needs of the diocese and how the diocesan structures might serve those needs, but how clearly he was the right hand of the bishop in a way reminiscent of how the bishop's deacon is supposed to have been in early days. A position like this will inevitably attract some criticism and envy, but basically it is a sound partnership between bishop and deacon furthering the life of the diocese.

Apart from this work, Bob does seem to be an unofficial leader of the deacons in the diocese, convening the local "cell" group, for instance. However, this position is exercised more through his personality than through his job.

Arlinda Cosby Arlinda is the head of the Episcopal Ministry to Convalescent Homes. She is a quietly determined woman, with an engaging manner and a presence that inspires confidence and trust. While she was studying to be a priest at CDSP, there grew a conviction that this was not the right state for her. Consequently she switched tracks and began to develop an understanding of a ministry as a deacon. This led into contact with some of the convalescent homes (a mixture of nursing homes and sheltered housing) that proliferate on the east side of San Francisco Bay.

If old age is a problem in contemporary Western culture, that problem is magnified in California, where the emphasis on youthfulness and the body beautiful is so pervasive. Convalescent homes provide a major answer to this by hiding old people away and, in a highly mobile society, effectively dumping them. On seeing the scope and need for a caring Christian ministry in these places, Arlinda began her current work with the backing of her own and neighbouring parishes.

The Episcopal Ministry to Convalescent Homes operates on three fronts at once. Firstly, it provides consciousness-raising exercises for parishes on the needs that exist and the most appropriate ways for them to respond. Secondly, it provides training and support for volunteers and relatives who wish to be more deeply involved. Thirdly, it offers an educational package to a parish, where Arlinda, a doctor and a lawyer explore with them a whole range of questions concerned with ageing.

How long this ministry can continue is uncertain, not because of a lack of need or interest, but through a lack of finance. In attempting to meet a social need in this way, people like Arlinda, and even the hospital chaplain and the prison chaplain we shall look at later, have not only to form their own personal and professional support systems but raise their own finance as well. The diocese of California does give some financial backing through Episcopal Charities to those ministries it takes under its wing, but even so the courage and conviction required of these deacons is great.

Ray Fox Ray is a bouncy, open character, who combines serious intent with a sense of fun. He is chaplain of the San Nateo County Jail in Redwood City, which holds prisoners on remand and those serving sentences of a year or less. Ray seems well integrated into the network of chaplains ecumenically, and is involved with a local organisation that assists prisoners on release and their families.

In many respects Ray's work is most similar to that of his counterpart in this country, as long as it is remembered that he is allowed to operate only by the continued goodwill of the authorities, which means in this case that Ray is able to minister much more freely and effectively when one officer is on duty than another.

He always wears a clerical collar on duty, and does not usually bother to explain that he is a deacon to those who assume he is a priest, though he does arrange for the

sacraments to be celebrated from time to time. As a deacon he concentrates on a ministry of listening and counselling, and is the only person normally exercising such a role in that prison. Significantly, he would see a major part of his task as equipping others to minister in prisons. He has an office at the nearby parish, where he functions liturgically, and has encouraged about 14 people from all over the county to take on their own form of prison ministry, as well as making the parishes more generally aware of the needs of prisons and the issues they raise.

Connie Hartquist Connie is chaplain of the San Francisco General Hospital. She is a most capable person, clear-headed and compassionate, and the three days I spent shadowing her crystallised for me the distinctiveness of ordained diaconal ministry more than any other single experience. Connie is a highly-trained and experienced hospital chaplain who understands her style of ministry as being that of a deacon. The General Hospital is a huge institution that has not had a sustained Episcopal chaplaincy before, mainly because it is a public hospital and Episcopalians tend to be able to afford medical insurance and go elsewhere.

When she came there in the summer of 1985, she established her credentials with the hospital staff, and began almost at once to attract people to work with her. She shares a small office with a Baptist Pastor and his two helpers, and a chapel with the Roman Catholic Chaplain (though with separate tabernacles!). This is in a sense symbolic of two traditional styles of ministry, but what Connie is doing is something quite different.

In the sixteen months up to October 1986 she has trained 27 volunteers as chaplain's assistants, and equipped them to minister confidently and ably in the hopsital for a few hours each week. Every volunteer goes on a twelve week course (2 hours per week), which is so good that some 'voluntarily' go through a second time. The chief

teaching method is role-play and group discussion under Connie's expert guidance, though sessions are also devoted to understanding the hospital and how it functions. Not only does this course give people confidence and skill in their approach to patients, it also allows them to find and exercise their own particular talents. So, for instance, one volunteer who is gifted with massage uses this most effectively in her ministry among people with AIDS. Because Ward 5A in this hospital is among the best facilities for people with AIDS anywhere, there is a small group of chaplain's assistants who specialise in working with them. Their training is identical, but they have extra support sessions to help them in what they are facing.

Connie estimates that she needs about 30 volunteers to give an adequate level of cover, and realises that she will need to continue to offer the training courses because the group cannot be stable, but also because priests and others in caring professions ask to come and increase their own skills with her. It is a regret to Connie that her work pattern is such that she hardly has any direct contact with patients now. Only once in the three days I was with her did she visit a patient, and that was to give communion in emergency to someone who had been stabbed. Most patients are Roman Catholic or non-practising, so the need for sacramental care is limited, though a local hispanic-speaking Anglican priest visits and deals with much of that side of things. As a deacon-chaplain, Connie understands her task as the equipping of others to exercise their ministry, and to see that the needs that she is there to serve are met in the most effective way possible. Her qualities are well attested by all those she pushes and challenges and loves into ministry, but they are also recognised in the wider church, where she has recently been elected as the first deacon, and I think the first woman, on the Standing Committee of the diocese.

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Each of these four profiles puts flesh on to the theology of diaconal ministry and the nature of the Church. They demonstrate in concrete ways that deacons make a distinctive difference in the Church and the way the Christian community relates to the world. This distinctiveness is not so much in what a deacon does in terms of servant ministry, because the servant nature of the Church means that it cannot help forming agencies of service or performing countless acts of service. But deacons are not agents or parts of the body as such for, like other ordained ministries, they are there to represent, to ensure, to icon (whichever terminology one is more comfortable with) the nature of the body itself. The deacon, as Servant-Leader in the Church, is present to inform the Body of Christ that servanthood is imprinted on every cell and organ of it - it is not an optional extra for any part, though some parts will be better able to perform some types of service than others. Out of this understanding of the nature of the Church the art of being a deacon becomes clear: to hold before the Church the image of Christ the Servant, and to be involved in or lead the process by which the needs of people in society are recognised and the people of God enabled to engage with and serve those needs, "....to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ." (Eph 4:12).

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NOTES

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(2) Barnett J M — The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order (Seabury 1979) P3.

(3) Lowrie W — The Church and its organisation in Primitive and Catholic Times (Longmans, Green 1904) P106.

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John E Booty — The Servant Church: Diaconal Ministry in the Episcopal Church (Moorehouse Barlow 1982)

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